

News Release

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COMMISSIONERS REPORT ON THE STATE OF FREDERICK COUNTY

FREDERICK, MD – The Frederick Board of County Commissioners today presented a comprehensive report on the <u>state of the county</u> in commemoration of the board's two-year anniversary of taking office. The <u>strategic goals</u> approved at the beginning of the term set the stage for actions by the commissioners in three main areas highlighted in the report: meeting budget and financial challenges, responding to the economy with an emphasis on jobs and <u>business-friendly initiatives</u>, and redefining the role of Frederick County Government.

Board President Blaine Young said, "This year's state of the county -- a snapshot in time of where we stand today -- shows that in spite of continuing challenges to the economy, Frederick County is making good progress and is heading in the right direction as far as budget, jobs, privatization and outsourcing of government-shared services, public safety, agricultural preservation, land use, housing and transportation.

"When this board was sworn into office two years ago, we were faced with a large budget deficit, very challenging economic conditions and the need for action in order to achieve considerable savings for our taxpayers without sacrificing citizen services. As we promised we would do, we have made many difficult decisions. But, as today's state of the county report shows, the results demonstrate that the county is looking up. "Our county government is more streamlined and better organized, we have greatly improved collaboration with the business community and our dedicated county employees continue to work hard to maintain excellent government operations with fewer resources. We thank our county manager, division directors and all the employees for their hard work in serving the citizens of Frederick County."

The complete report on the <u>state of the county</u> is available on the Board of County Commissioners' webpage at <u>www.FrederickCountyMD.gov/bocc</u>.

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The report includes the following:

- Reports on demographics, the economy, jobs and housing permits.
- Tough budget choices: space consolidation, reduced library hours, reduced road maintenance; the need for continued savings through energy conservation; relinquishment of grant funding for the Head Start program; Frederick Community College increases in tuition; continued hiring freeze (except for vacant critical positions); reduction of the workforce; deferral of funding for capital projects, and reorganization of divisions and departments.
- Business-friendly improvements: development of 263 <u>action items</u> with 73 percent completed.
- Reports on property tax, income tax, recordation tax and investment income. Many taxpayer relief initiatives were noted senior property tax credit, \$100 rebate tax credits to all homeowner occupied properties, building excise and other taxes reduced to a zero.
- Education initiatives Frederick Community College funding, no cuts to K-12 funding and school construction projects.
- County employee initiatives merit step and COLA for the first time in four years. Budget-saving moves in restructuring of the workforce. Reports on pension and retirees' health benefits.
- Potentially adverse state impacts that may come next year such as the shift of teacher pensions to county government at an estimated cost of \$12 \$15 million and the prospect of total maximum daily load stormwater management regulations at an estimated cost of \$4 to \$5 billion.
- A comparison of past budgets and a look at the fiscal integrity of Frederick County, which saw an improvement in its bond rating due to the board's commitment to address structural imbalances through expenditure cuts without material reliance on one-time resources.
- Charts that compare taxes by jurisdiction.
- OPEB/pension funded ratios; charts on the urban and suburban fire taxes.
- A report on county's exceptional school system: For the fourth consecutive year, no Frederick
 <u>County Public School</u> (FCPS) senior failed to graduate as a result of not meeting Maryland's
 High School Assessment requirement; FCPS had the state's third highest graduation rate at 91.5
 percent and the lowest dropout rate at 5.05 percent; SAT scores continue to surpass state and
 national scores, and *Newsweek* again listed all nine of the county's high schools on its list of
 America's Best High Schools for 2012.
- School construction (Lincoln Elementary, Oakdale Elementary and North Frederick Elementary additions, expansion and replacement).

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- Working with municipalities on synergies in locating cost efficiencies and savings through
 mutual partnerships, such as the elimination of charging local governments for tax billings and
 working through tax set-offs and tax differentials. Cooperative efforts with municipalities
 resulted in such achievements as a new library, fire station and the resolution of the water system
 crisis in Brunswick and Rosemont.
- Public-private partnerships: Continued exploration and identification of cost savings available through privatization and the creation of public-private partnerships in the delivery of county government programs and services.
- Public safety The crime rate per capita in Frederick County is less than one-half the national average. The Sheriff's Office is the only agency in Maryland that partners with the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency and participates in the 287(g) program, which has resulted in 966 detainers lodged on criminal aliens since the program's inception. The Sheriff's Office was the lead agency for the 2012 G-8 Summit, coordinated state, municipal and federal law enforcement resources and hosted a Joint Information Center.
- Public safety <u>fire and rescue</u> responded to 32,187 calls in FY 2012 and the county continues to maintain a strong career and volunteer base of dedicated personnel.
- Parks & Recreation Division maintained 18 developed parks and 2,066 acres of park land, which were enjoyed by over 1.7 million estimated visitors to date in 2012. Urbana District Park opened in June 2012.
- <u>Animal Control</u> reports on intake, adoption and total calls of 10,263 during FY2012.
- Frederick County Public Libraries served 1,947,745 visitors annually, with 5,629 daily average visitors served at eight branch locations -- in spite of reductions in hours and other cutbacks.
- Roads and bridges With 1,271 centerline miles, Frederick County has 219 bridges (over 20 foot span), and road, bridge and highway projects remain a priority.
- <u>Citizens Services</u>: TransIT Services doubled their ridership increase in FY12; the Department of Aging will soon accept credit cards; the county website now accepts donations, which offset county costs, and the Department of Housing is partnering with Frederick County Habitat for Humanity, Inc., through a new land trust initiative that will create a permanent sustainable supply of affordable workforce housing.
- The <u>Interagency Information Technologies</u> Division reported on increased public information through public service announcements, new programming, the "<u>donate now</u>" option on the county website and expanded card options for payments.
- <u>Health Services</u> reported that the county moved to third best in Maryland for Health Factors, the work of health staff in schools, Scott Key Center employment assistance for those with disabilities, and other issues.

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- <u>Citizens Care and Rehabilitation Center</u> and <u>Montevue Assisted Living</u> moved into their new 156,000 square foot, state-of-the-art facility in spring 2012.
- Public Safety <u>Emergency Management</u>: The Emergency Communications Department (911 Center) took in over 260,700 calls, partnered with law enforcement agencies during the G-8 Summit and coordinated the county-wide response to the Derecho storm and Hurricane Sandy.
- Emergency Management also completed an \$18.7 million Motorola Solutions digital trunked radio system upgrade project in partnership with The City of Frederick, City of Brunswick, and State of Maryland, and launched the <u>ALERT Frederick County</u> notification system to improve communications. All municipal, county, state, and federal public safety agencies and the majority of non-public safety government agencies in Frederick County can communicate directly on the shared digital radio system to more effectively serve the citizens while minimizing operating costs.
- The Frederick/Carroll County Renewable Waste-to-Energy Facility planned for the McKinney Industrial Park will be able process 1,500 tons of trash per day (in addition to other items), as well as generate up to 51 megawatts of renewable electricity. The report also covered the approval/permitting progress, costs and efforts to seek a possible replacement for Carroll County.
- A report on roads, bridges, interchanges in Frederick County.
- <u>Agricultural Preservation Program</u> Frederick County has preserved 48,726 agricultural acres and another 16,269 acres on 105 easements through the Installment Purchase Program.

For further information on the state of the county report, contact Ragen Cherney, Office of the County Manager, at 301-600-1049 or via e-mail at rcherney@FrederickCountyMD.gov.

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